

# Best Management Practices

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



## Eastern Massasauga

*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*

**Common name** • Eastern Massasauga

**Scientific name** • *Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*

**Federal status** • Candidate

**State status** • Endangered

### Ecology

Eastern massasaugas range from central New York and Pennsylvania westward into Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois, and southward into Missouri. These snakes occur in north-central to northeastern Missouri, north of the Missouri River. The eastern massasauga inhabits marshy or swamp areas dominated by cordgrass, sedges and bulrushes, as well as lowlands along rivers and lakes. Eastern massasaugas are active during the day from mid-April to early October. They overwinter in moist lowland areas, using burrows made by crayfish or other animals for shelter. Mating occurs in spring, and females give birth to 4-10 live young in late summer. It is likely that females in Missouri produce a litter of young only every other year. Eastern massasaugas prey on mainly deer mice and voles.

### Reasons for Decline

Although eastern massasaugas have a large historic range that encompasses many states in the upper Midwest, they are becoming rare or uncommon throughout their range, including Missouri. Cultivation, draining of marshes and indiscriminate killing of the snakes have greatly reduced the populations.

### Specific Recommendations

Eastern massasaugas are somewhat tolerant of agricultural development, but they require a mixture of habitat types to reproduce and safely overwinter. For this reason, it is important to minimize impacts of projects to all areas and types of habitat within the range of this species. As do many reptiles, eastern massasaugas play an important role in the food chain. These snakes may act as natural controls of populations of rodents that could damage crops and other vegetation.

→ Avoid removing or destroying unique habitat features, such as downed trees, logs, rock piles and brush piles, that provide habitat for the eastern massasauga.

→ Draining or destroying known wetland habitat should be avoided.

→ Disposal of wastes and garbage should be done in designated areas far from wetlands.

→ Avoid altering water levels in wetlands where eastern massasauga are present.

→ Prescribed burning and mowing should be done during the period when snakes are dormant, preferably between October 30 and March 15.

### General Recommendations

→ Refer to Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands and Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Streams and Rivers.

→ Refer also to Amphibian and Reptile Management Guidelines.

### Information Contacts

For further information regarding regulations for development in wetlands, rivers and streams, contact:

Missouri Department of Conservation  
Policy Coordination Section  
P.O. Box 180  
2901 W. Truman Blvd  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180  
Telephone: 573/751-4115

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176  
Telephone: 573/526-3315

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Regulatory Branch  
700 Federal Building  
Kansas City, MO 64106-2896  
Telephone: 816/983-3990

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Water, Wetlands, and Pesticides Division  
901 North 5th Street  
Kansas City, KS 66101  
Telephone: 913/551-7307

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ecological Services Field Office  
608 E. Cherry Street, Room 200  
Columbia, MO 65201  
Telephone: 573/876-1911

## **Disclaimer**

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